

8 September 1977

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Response to Questions on Ethiopian Cities

The three Ethiopian cities of Dire Dawa, Harar, and Jijiga lie along the edge of the Rift Valley that separates the rugged Ethiopian highlands from the coastal plain extending inward from Somalia. Their geography contributes to their role as military strong points.

None of the three is typical of either Ethiopia or Somalia, and none is in the area formally designated as the Ogaden--i.e., the southeastern region administered by Ethiopia since World War II. Somali claims to all parts of Ethiopia inhabited predominantly by Somali ethnic groups, however, take in the region surrounding the three cities and, by some accounts, extend as far as the Awash River to the north and west.

Dire Dawa, the third largest city in Ethiopia, is of considerable economic importance. It lies at roughly the half-way point of the Djibouti-Addis Ababa railroad--now out of operation--and was the major maintenance center. It also services the still-open road between Djibouti and Addis Ababa. An Ethiopian Air Group is stationed at Dire Dawa, and it is the site of major military storage depots. Because of its role as a commercial, transportation, and military center, Dire Dawa has a mixed and fairly cosmopolitan population.

Harar is the headquarters of the Ethiopian army's Third Division, charged with defense against Somali invasion. The city has long been an important Muslim religious center, though located in Christian Ethiopia. Its

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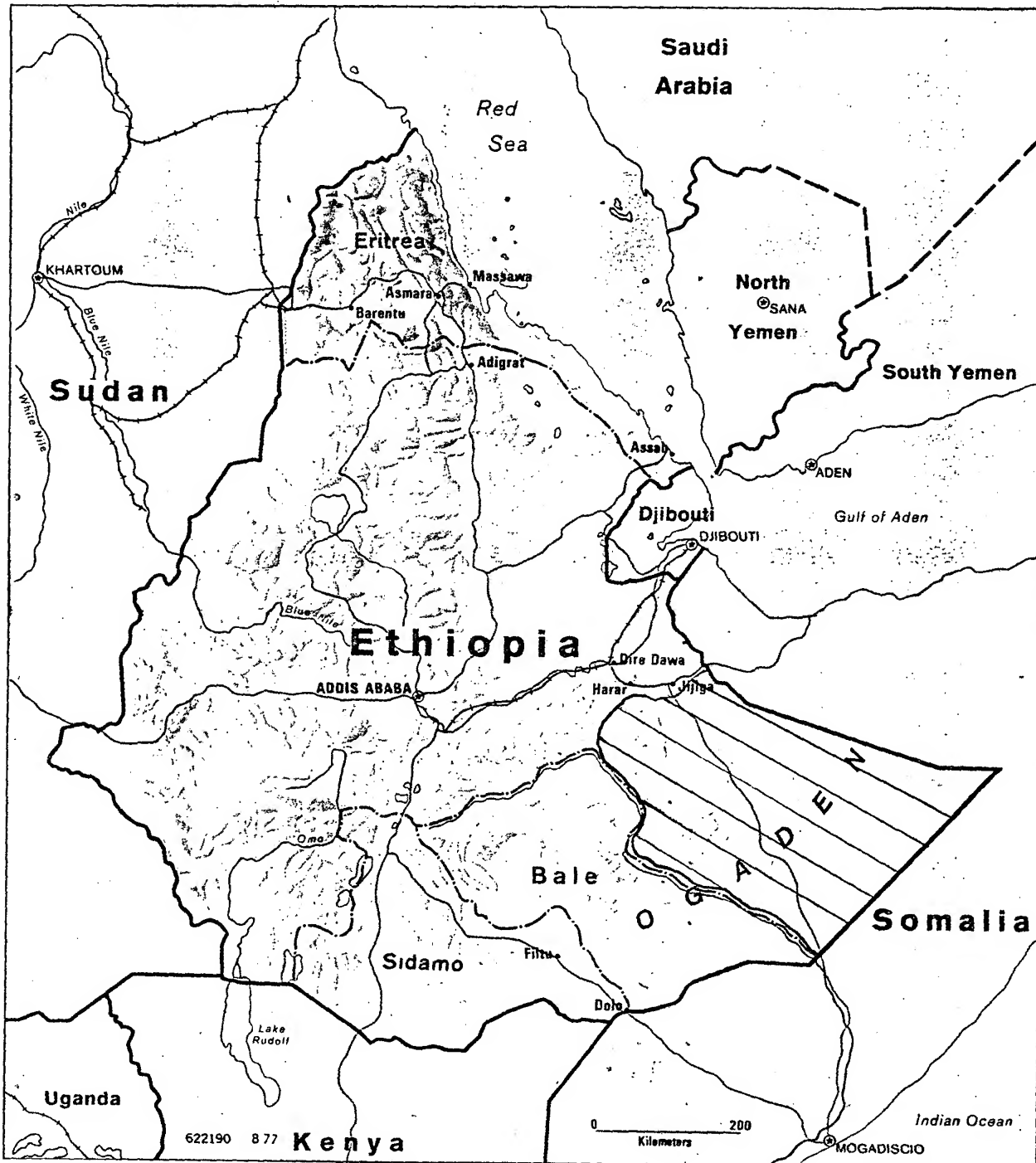
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population is mainly Galla, the largest--but traditionally suppressed--ethnic group in Ethiopia. The city also claims special status as the home area of both former Emperor Haile Salassie and Chairman Mengistu.

Jijiga is more exposed militarily than the other two cities, and is of less political and economic importance. It has been the scene of a major, and apparently still indecisive, battle between Ethiopian and Somali forces for the past two weeks.

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Approximate geographic limits of the Ogaden area.

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